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THE THEATRE.

JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

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THE THEATRE:

AN ESSAY UPON THE NON-ACCORDANCY OF STAGE-PLAYS WITH THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION.

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BY
JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

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"THE THEATRES ARE FOUNTAINS AND MEANS OF VICE. I CAN HARDLY THINK THERE IS A CHRISTIAN UPON EARTH WHO WOULD DARE TO BE SEEN THERE IF THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF THE THEATRE WERE PROPERLY SET BEFORE HIM."—*JOHN NEWTON.*

PREFATORY NOTE.

ALTHOUGH most of the following essay recently appeared in a weekly periodical of the Society of Friends, the writer had likewise in view, in preparing it, its probable re-issue as a tract, and circulation over a much wider field. He has since been encouraged by many to carry out that purpose.

It will be admitted that some treatises upon the theatre exhibit the abounding wickedness of the stage with so much fidelity that, although very useful in certain hands, they are not exactly fitted for reading aloud in families or for perusal by the young generally. Indeed, they may even stimulate a morbid interest in place of inciting, as desired, sentiments of repugnance against and abhorrence for the detailed evil. The writer has been solicitous in the following pages to avoid this objection. But, though less full in the direction pointed out than some others, it is hoped that this essay will prove of definite value in that it deals with sundry aspects of the subject which are usually either not at all or not much considered in treating of the play-house and its perils.

Philadelphia, Seventh Month, 1884.

The Theatre of the Past.

In his treatise *De Spectaculis*, that early Christian writer, Tertullian, says: "I heard lately a novel defense of himself by a certain play-lover. 'The sun,' said he—'nay, God Himself—looks down from heaven on the show, and no pollution is contracted.' Yes, and the sun, too, pours down his rays into the common sewer without being defiled. But He [God] looks on robbers, too; He looks on falsehoods, and adulteries, and frauds, and idolatries, and these same shows; and precisely on that account we will not look on them lest the All-Seeing see us."

The Theatre of the Present.

Says Bishop Coxe, of Western New York: "All that theory can adduce in defense of a possible drama vanishes before the gross sensuality of the actual stage. The voice of Christian antiquity denounces as anti-Christian the whole system of the play-house, and the very heathen lash as obscene and shameful, scenes which are exhibited to 'young men and maidens' in New York and all over the land. 'I go to the theatre myself,' said a young man to me lately, 'but I thought the devil himself must have laughed when he saw a communicant of the Church there.'"

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THE THEATRE.

It was told me by a Friend that a certain person with whom he was well acquainted in his younger years, having made an appointment to meet one of his associates at a theatre entrance, was so struck by the usher's iteration of "This way to the pit! This way to the pit!" that, appalled at the peril to which he was exposing his soul, he hastily left the place, and was never afterward seen at such a resort. I have thought that no argument more convincing can be offered in opposition to theatre-going, none more likely to impress us with its debasing tendency, than that which may be found in simply scanning the countenances and observing the demeanor of the crowd as they leave one of our play-houses of the popular sort. We are morally certain that these people have not "been with Jesus," that they have not been employed "to the glory of God," but rather that, walking in the way of sinners and in the counsel of the ungodly, they have cast in their lot with those who "go down into the pit."

Now, we in the city are surrounded by multitudes of the frequenters of such places; we are sure that the souls of these people are, in the Almighty's estimation, of equal value with our own, and, although as a religious society we have a clear testimony against the play-house, and our membership as a whole is nearly free

from countenancing such resorts, yet we will not have done our duty in this particular unless, showing ourselves alive to the magnitude of the evil, and following the counsel of the apostle Jude concerning those who "walk after their own ungodly lusts," we do our part in faithfully "pulling them out of the fire." Said the late William Evans in his journal (1849): "The kingdom of Satan is gaining ground in this land, and if those who consider themselves lovers of religion slacken their watchfulness and their resistance to wrong things, the tide of compliance must gain a powerful ascendency over the morals of the people at large."

It will be the scope of this essay to show the adverse estimation in which stage-plays have been held by the best of men of ancient and modern times, and how local communities and States have, in very self-defense, forbidden them; that many actors themselves, conceding the demoralizing character of their occupation, have united in condemning the plays, whilst others of them—apologists for the stage—have been unable successfully to defend, as they have likewise repeatedly failed in the effort to reform, it, seeing that it "exists only under a law of degeneracy;" that an invariable accompaniment of stage-plays, and that which establishes the constant trend to degeneracy, is the dissimulation and violation of truth involved in the acting; that the personal experience (to be briefly detailed) of some righteous people of our own time is very confirming in that it clearly shows the wanton and unsatisfying char-

The scope of this essay.

acter of such and similar pleasures; that an inevitable result of theatre-going is the corruption of youth, and, as consequents, law-breaking and overt crime; but that to pernicious reading and to general negligence of parental restraint and training are to be largely referred the growth of these depraving tendencies; that many of our American cities, following the custom of the capitals of Europe in tolerating stage-plays and amusements generally on the first day of the week, are adding iniquity to iniquity and inviting the righteous judgments of the Almighty on account thereof; and finally, that the professing Church of our day, through countenancing (under cloak of religion) a great variety of worldly entertainments—as sociables, feasts, bazars, tableaux, dancing—has not only weakened the ancient testimony of condemnation against the theatre, but by becoming in effect the world's ally, has made easy the way of multitudes to resort to it.

Rome and Athens concemn the theatre.

An English writer of last century, Arthur Bedford* cites the following concerning the theatre in ancient Athens and Rome. Quoting from Plutarch, he says that the consequences of the corrupt plays in Athens were severely felt in getting the people's money as well as in demoralizing them; that inspectors were appointed for its better regulation, but this plan not succeeding, a law was enacted that

*A Serious Remonstrance in behalf of the Christian Religion against the Horrid Blasphemies and Impieties which are still used in the English Play-Houses, to the great dishonoring of Almighty God, and in contempt of the Statutes of this Realm. By Arthur Bedford. London, 1719.

common actors should be reputed infamous. At last the evil became so serious that the theatre was totally suppressed.* Bedford adds: "How, then, will *they* rise up in judgment against us and condemn us if we are remiss in this matter." Following Tertullian, he says: "When the plays were corrupted in heathen Rome, a very early law was made against them, in which they were declared infamous; and it was enacted that no actor should be admitted to the Court, the Bar, or the Senate, and should also be incapable of any military or other honor or esteem: And, therefore, when God enters into judgment for these things, will it not be more tolerable for them than it will be for us?"

"The Lacedæmonians," says Collier,† also on the authority of Plutarch, "were remarkable for the wisdom of their laws, the sobriety of their manners, and their breeding of brave men—this government would not endure the stage in any form nor under any regulation."

The citizens of ancient Marseilles, we are told, would admit no stage-plays into their city, lest their filthiness should corrupt their youth.

Xenophon, Seneca, Tacitus, Plato, Ovid, were among the noted Greeks and Romans who raised their voices

* "When tragedy and comedy were first enacted at Athens, they were soon abolished by public authority as being enervating; and among the Romans, so cautious were they of permitting them to be frequent, that a theatre, when occasionally erected, was not allowed to continue above a prescribed number of days."—Witherspoon.

It may be added that, upon the score of public morality, the first stone theatre among the Romans was pulled down when nearly finished, B. C. 155.

† A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage: together with the Sense of Antiquity upon this Argument. By Jeremy Collier. London, 1698.

against the theatre as a school of vice, a corrupter of youth, and the disgrace of those nations. And when theatrical shows were introduced by Herod into Jerusalem, Josephus spoke of them in strong terms of reprobation, as "tending to corrupt the morals of the Jewish nation, to bring the people into love with Pagan idolatry, and to throw contempt on the law of Moses."

Respecting the belief and general practice of the Primitive Christians hereupon, Milner, the Church historian, testifies: "A Christian renouncing the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and yet frequenting the play-house, was, with the Christians of the first three centuries, a solecism. The effusion of the Holy Spirit, during those centuries, never admitted those amusements at all."

Stage plays not tolerated by the Primitive Christians.

A well-known but somewhat rare work against stage-plays is Edward Prynne's *Histrio Mastix*, a book of more than one thousand pages, which was published in London in the time of Charles the Second (1663). It is a treatise of invaluable authority on the subject. The following are some of this writer's citations from the early Christian fathers in opposition to the theatre:

TERTULLIAN: "Stage plays are the pomps of the devil, against which we have renounced in our baptism." He also styles the play-house "the devil's church."

CLEMENT, of Rome, calls stage-plays "the pomps of idols and spectacles of the devil," and hence strenuously cautions all Christians to shun and avoid them.

CYRIL, of Jerusalem: "The devil's pomp which we

renounce in baptism are those spectacles or plays in theatres, and all other vanities of this kind from which the holy man of God, desiring to be freed, saith,—'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.'"

AUGUSTINE gives them the same titles as the foregoing, and decries the faithlessness of professing Christians in "going one while into the church to pray, and after awhile running to the play-house to cry out impudently with stage-players."

CHRYSOSTOM, the eloquent preacher, is very outspoken, calling stage-plays "the impure food of the devil," and play-houses his conventicles, and so zealous was he against them that he avers (perhaps too confidently): "I will never give over preaching until I have dissipated and rent asunder [this theatre-going]; that so the assembly of the Church may be made pure and clean, freed from its present filthiness, and enjoy eternal life hereafter, by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ their Lord."

SALVIAN, Bishop of Marseilles, says of theatre-goers who have embraced the new faith—"Thou hast once renounced the devil and his spectacles, and by this thou must needs know that thou dost return to the devil, when thou dost wittingly and knowingly return to stage-plays."

"The true soldiers of Christ," says BERNARD, "reject and abominate players and stage-plays, as vanities and false frenzies."

Prynne quotes still others, the foremost writers among the early Christians and those of the centuries immediately succeeding, as Cyprian, Lactantius, Ambrose, Basil,

etc., as well as the deliberate acts of fifty-four General, National, and Provincial Councils, ancient and modern, all bearing unequivocal testimony against plays and play-houses as being Satan's own. Hence, summing up the testimony gathered from the primitive period of the Christian Church, our author says: "We have the express testimony of sundry Fathers and Councils, that all the godly Christians in the Primitive Church did wholly withdraw themselves from stage-plays; that all those Pagans who either acted or frequented plays, did immediately upon their conversion to the Christian faith, and their very first admittance into the Church of Christ, ever publicly renounce all future acting or resort to plays; and that none but Pagans, unchaste, profane, and graceless persons, who were cast out of the Church by public censures, did use to flock unto them."

Having thus pursued the subject, more exhaustively perhaps than any other writer, Prynne gives his views upon reforming the stage, in the following plainly expressed and eloquent conclusion:

"Many are the laws which have been enacted; much the care that hath been taken by sundry states and censors in all ages to lop off the enormities, allay the poison, purge out the filth and gross corruptions of these stage-plays, and so to reduce them to a laudable and inoffensive use: but yet these Ethiopians still retain their black infernal hue; these vipers keep their soul-devouring poison still; these Augean stables are as polluted (yea, more defiled) now,

Prynne upon reforming the stage.

as ever neretofore: no art, no age, no nation could ever yet abridge, much less reform, their exorbitant corruptions and enormities; their hurt doth far transcend their good; their abuses far overpoise their use; they are so crooked and distorted in themselves, that no art can make them straight; there is no other means left to reform them, but utterly to abolish them."

Leaving Prynne, who (as said before) wrote in the time of the profligate Charles the Second and his dissolute court, let us consult the views upon theatre-going of one who, upward of a century later, made careful examination of the subject: I allude to the excellent Hannah More. The possessor, as was thought, of some dramatic talent, she was introduced to the celebrated actor Garrick, with a view to her going upon the stage; but becoming convinced of the demoralizing character of the pursuit, she happily relinquished her purpose. This discerning woman, in adducing the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and of the unflattering witness within, remarks:

"I would take leave of those amiable and not ill-disposed young persons who complain of the rigor of human prohibitions, and declare 'they meet with no such strictness in the gospel,' by asking them with the most affectionate earnestness, if they can conscientiously reconcile their nightly attendance at every public place which they frequent, with such precepts as the following: 'Redeeming the time'—'Watch and pray'—'Watch, for ye know not at what time your Lord cometh'—'Abstain from all appearance

Testimony of Hannah More.

of evil'—'Set your affections on things above'—'Be ye spiritually minded'—'Crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.' And I would venture to offer one criterion by which the persons in question may be enabled to decide on the positive innocence and safety of such diversions; I mean, provided they are sincere in their scrutiny and honest in their avowal. If, on their return at night from these places they find they can retire and 'commune with their own hearts;' if they can 'bring every thought into subjection,' and concentrate every wandering imagination, if they can soberly examine into their own state of mind: I do not say, if they can do all this perfectly and without distraction (for who can do this at any time?) but, if they can do it with the same *degree* of seriousness, pray with the same *degree* of fervor, and renounce the world in as great a *measure* as at other times; and if they can lie down with a peaceful consciousness of having avoided in the evening that 'temptation' which they had prayed not to be 'led into' in the morning, they may then more reasonably hope that all is well, and that they are not speaking false peace in their hearts.

"Again, if we cannot beg the blessing of our Maker on whatever we are going to do or to enjoy, is it not an unequivocal proof that the thing ought not to be done or enjoyed? On all the rational enjoyments of society, on all healthful and temperate exercise, on the delights of friendship, arts, and polished letters, on the exquisite pleasures resulting from the enjoyment of rural scenery and the beauties of nature; on the innocent participation

of these we may ask the divine favor—for the sober enjoyment of these we may thank the divine beneficence; but do we feel equally disposed to invoke blessings or return praises for gratifications found (to say no worse) in levity, in vanity, and waste of time? If these tests were fairly used; if these experiments were honestly tried; if these examinations were conscientiously made, may we not without offense presume to ask—*Could* our numerous places of public resort, *could* our ever-multiplying scenes of more select but not less dangerous diversion, nightly overflow with an excess hitherto unparalleled in the annals of pleasure?"

Next, in regard to the stage being a school of morals, as some have vainly claimed, John Witherspoon, President of Princeton College, wrote as follows in his *Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage.*

"If the stage be a proper method of promoting the interests of religion, then is Satan's kingdom divided against itself, which he is more cunning than to suffer it to be. For whatever debate there be, whether good men *may* attend the theatre, there can be no question at all that no openly vicious man is an enemy to it, and that the far greater part of them do passionately love it. Nothing is more certain than that, taking the world according to its appearance, it is the worse part of it that shows most passion for this entertainment, and the best that avoids and fears it, than which there can hardly be a worse sign of it as a means of doing good."

The stage not a school of morals.

This assumption of moral teaching on behalf of the stage is controverted in an essay against plays issued by the Jansenists of Port Royal about the beginning of last century. They say:

"It is so true that plays are almost always a representation of vicious passions, that the most part of Christian virtues are incapable of appearing upon the stage. Silence, patience, moderation, poverty, repentance, are no virtues the representation of which can divert the spectators; and above all, we never hear humility spoken of, and the bearing of injuries. It would be strange to see a modest and silent religious person represented. There must be something great and renowned according to men, or at least something lively and animated, which is not met withal in Christian gravity and wisdom; and therefore, those who have been desirous to introduce holy men and women upon the stage have been forced to make them appear proud, and to make them utter discourses more proper for the ancient Roman heroes than for saints and martyrs."

To recur again to Prynne—he also says, respecting stage-plays teaching virtues: "But I never yet could hear or read of any ancient or modern actor, composer, or spectator of any theatrical interludes whom plays recalled from the love, the practice of any vices, that were ever acted on the stage, whereas they have drawn millions to imitate them."

It may now be instructive to give ear to the "sober second thought" of some of the play-actors themselves.

Colley Cibber, for forty years an actor, has this to remark concerning his occupation. Writing in the time of Queen Anne, he says: "While vice and farcical folly are the most profitable commodities, why should we wonder that, time out of mind, the poor comedian when real vice could bear no price should deal in what would bring him most ready money? But this, you will say, is making the stage a nursery of vice and folly, or at least keeping an open shop for it. *I grant it.*"

Testimony of play-actors—Colley Cibber

In an epilogue composed by Dr. Johnson, and spoken by Cibber's successor, Garrick, at the re-opening of Drury Lane Theatre upon a professedly reformed basis, there occurs this sentiment:

> "Ah! let not censure term our fate our choice,
> The stage but echoes back the public voice;
> The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
> For we that live to please must please to live."

Dumas, who wrote *Camille*, said: "You do not take your daughter to see my play. You are right. Let me say once for all, you must not take your daughter to the theatre. It is not merely the work that is immoral, it is the place. Whenever we paint men, there must be a grossness that cannot be placed before all eyes; and whenever the theatre is elevated and loyal, it can live only by using the color of truth. The theatre being the picture or satire of the passions and social manners, it must be immoral—the passions and social manners themselves being immoral."

Dumas.

Edwin Booth, in a letter to the *Christian Union*, says: "I

never permit my wife or daughter to witness a play without previously ascertaining its character. * * * While the theatre is permitted to be a mere shop for gain, open to every huckster of immoral gimcracks, there is no other way to discriminate between the pure and base than through the experience of others." (This E. Booth, in his vain attempt to reform the stage, lost a fortune.) W. C. Macready, another noted actor, said: "None of my children shall ever, with my consent, or on any pretence, enter a theatre, or have any visiting connection with actors or actresses." Sheridan Knowles, once a successful playwright and actor, having become a Christian, renounced the stage as utterly evil, and devoted the remainder of his life to preaching the Gospel.

Edwin Booth.

Macready and Knowles.

Says Theodore L. Cuyler, writing on the *Perils of the Play-House:* "One of the most celebrated actresses of this time informed a friend of mine that she 'only enters a theatre to enact her part, and has very little conversation with her own profession.' A converted actor once said to me while passing a play-house in which he had often performed,—'Behind those curtains lies Sodom.' Although sorely pressed to return to his old pursuits, he said he would sooner starve than go on the stage again. These men certainly knew whereof they affirmed."

Of play-acting, the actress Siddons says that it is a business "unworthy of a woman." Frances Kemble, in her *Reminiscences of the Stage*—a recent installment of which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*—gives the

subjoined striking testimony. Describing her first appearance on the stage, she says:

"So my life was determined, and I devoted myself to an avocation which I never liked or honored, and about the very nature of which I have never been able to come to a decided opinion. It is in vain that the undoubted specific gifts of great actors and actresses suggest that all gifts are given for rightful exercise; in vain that Shakespeare's plays urge the imperative claim to the most perfect illustration they can receive from histrionic interpretation: a business which is incessant excitement and factitious emotion seems to me unworthy of man; a business which is public exhibition is unworthy of a woman." * * "Never," she further says, "have I presented myself before an audience without a shrinking feeling of reluctance, or withdrawn from their presence without thinking the excitement I had undergone unhealthy and the personal exhibition odious."

Kemble and Siddons.

In endeavoring to account (after her public appearance at Drury Lane) for the origin of the deep impression that she had entertained as to the moral dangers of the life upon which she was then entering—for, she says, this fearfulness certainly came not from her parents, who seemed not to have been troubled with any moral repugnance to their calling—she proceeds: "I had never heard the nature of it discussed, and was absolutely without experience of it; but the vapid vacuity of the last years of my aunt Siddons' life had made a profound

impression upon me—her apparent deadness and indifference to everything, which I attributed (unjustly perhaps) less to her advanced age than to what I supposed the withering and drying influence of the over-stimulating atmosphere of emotion, excitement, and admiration in which she had passed her life; certain it is that such was my dread of the effect of my profession upon me that I added an earnest petition to my daily prayers that I might be defended from the evil influences I feared might be exercised upon me."

Dispassionate testimony of Montague Stanley.

Montague Stanley, an English actor of note, became so convinced of the sinfulness of the stage that, for conscience' sake, he relinquished it, and that at a time when he was considered to be one of the most rising men in his profession. In the midst of the popular applause his mind had been ill at ease, so that, finally, God's grace leading him to a true discernment of the way he had been treading and the privilege of giving up all for Christ, he was enabled to make this entry in his journal:—"April 28. Last night of my dramatic career; and now, thanks be to the Lord, who hath called me from darkness to light, I am emancipated from a most ungodly profession. May the Lord bless and prosper me in my new one." Later he said, as to the peril and guilt of the theatre frequenters: "They are leading others by their example to do as they are doing, and they are verily guilty of their brother's blood when he falls into the snare of ungodliness and is taken. They are upholding a system of

enormous wickedness. It is useless for any person to say that the theatre would go on whether he paid his money or not. It would *not* go on if it were deserted by the audience. Every individual, then, who contributes a fraction at the door of a theatre for admission is a partaker with all those sitting around him in the common sin of supporting a vast machinery of corruption."

Not less convincing than the above is the (late) changed experience and the testimony of one of our own countrymen, who for more than twenty years followed the stage in the various characters of clown, minstrel, and regular play-actor. Having seen the folly of, and abandoned his former occupation, he has been much occupied during the past three years in calling others from the evil of their way, with the result that quite a number of stage-players have abandoned the pursuit and turned to more morally-profitable engagements. At a lecture given some months ago in the city of New York he gave a sketch of his life, in which he pointed out from his own experience that "the way of the transgressor is hard." Blessed with a good Christian home—the remembrance of which never left him in all the years of his wandering—he confessed, nevertheless, that often, after his mother had given him her "good-night kiss" and supposed he was asleep, he would dress himself and steal out of the house to go to the theatre—so strong had become his infatuation for the play.

A changed American actor.

Referring to the way in which professing Christians

turn their backs upon the Master in this matter—frequenting the play-house and siding with the *enemies* of truth and righteousness—he said: "I have stood by the footlights many a night and recognized in the audience Christian men by whose side I had sat in church. You all know the influence of such conduct upon the young. And not only young men, but old gray-haired men appear in those places nightly; and, though not a Christian, I have blushed again and again to see Christian (?) men laughing at and applauding scenes of vice and vulgarity." Concluding, he said he could not understand how any man who has given his heart to Christ can enter those gateways to hell, and he knew actors who are longing to get away from the influences that surround them and the bonds that hold them to the stage.

When Dr. Judson was attending college he imbibed the poison of unbelief, so that the truths and the comforts of the Christian religion became (apparently) of no value to him. Leaving college, he came to New York upon the special errand of acquainting himself thoroughly with theatrical life in case he should conclude to adopt dramatic authorship as his profession. For this purpose he attached himself to a company of strolling players, leading, for awhile, a reckless, vagabond life, and, as opportunity offered, running up a score and departing without paying. His subsequent sorrow for this disgraceful episode of his life was so poignant, that before sailing for Burmah he could only find rest by an attempt at reparation.

Judson a strolling-p'ayer—His sorrow and reparation.

He says: "Before leaving America, when the enormity of this vicious course rested with a depressing weight on my mind, I made a second tour over the same ground, carefully making amends to all whom I had injured."

The following instructive circumstance, illustrating the good accompanying a "word in season," has been furnished the writer: As a Friend, a minister, was walking the street in a low state of mind, he became conscious that a young woman was walking by his side. She addressed him by saying that her father, a general residing in a Southern State, had so high an esteem for the Quakers that she felt impelled to speak to him as one of them.

Timely counsel to a would-be actress.

Entering into conversation, the Friend found that, at the persuasion of some of her friends who thought she would succeed as an actress, she had come to Philadelphia to prepare to appear upon the stage, and was then taking lessons in elocution for that purpose. The Friend, expressing his sorrow, said he had read that "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever," but there was no such promise recorded for those who were instrumental in leading others to the brink of the pit of destruction, as would probably be her experience if she carried out her plans. Some days or weeks after, she came to the place of business of her faithful counselor and told him that the words he had uttered had remained constantly with her, and that she had now determined to give up her project and return to her father, who had never approved of her scheme.

A gay young lady was once expatiating upon the varied pleasures attendant upon theatre-going—the pleasures of anticipation, with that of seeing and hearing, and also of recollecting the scene—when a godly man observed, "Madam, there is one pleasure you have forgotten." "What is that?" queried the lady. "The pleasure of remembering it on your dying bed."

In speaking of the perils of the play-house, it is therefore not alone the imminent danger to the attenders which has to be considered, but also, as just intimated, the moral loss—frequently the overwhelming moral loss—which is sure to accrue to the players themselves. I will introduce this aspect of the subject by quoting the following brief paragraph concerning a widely known American actor who died not many years ago, premising the quotation with the remark that the words were written by a friendly hand and that the glimpse they give of the inner life of this actor of note is doubtless not unlike that of very many who live by the stage:

Moral loss to the play-actors themselves.

"His habitual mood was one of levity. He loved and trusted but very few persons. It suited his humor to jest and to seek excitement and distraction; first, because his temperament naturally bloomed in a frolic atmosphere, and then because he wished to suppress melancholy feelings and a gloomy proneness to self-reproach and saddening introspection. In his domestic life he was unfortunate; and he lived to learn—as all do who depart from innocence—that the wrong that is done to the affections can never be righted on earth."

An actor of eminence was performing before a large audience the leading part in a startling tragedy which was represented as ending in the hero's death. Though in a decline, he did his part so well that thunders of applause followed the curtain's fall. The effort, however, had been too much for the actor's strength, so that he lingered in life a few days only. When told that there was no hope for him, a terrible despair settled upon his countenance. Grasping the physician's wrist, he cried out: "O, S——! the theatre may do for us to live by, but, oh! it will not do to die by. We have all sinned against the Lord our God—but be sure our sins will find us out." With these words upon his lips the wretched man expired, but the physician never forgot the thrilling words which confessed the mockery of the play-house, nor the convulsive grasp which seemed as though it would tear aside the mask of its hollowness and gay delusion.

Remorse of a dying tragedian.

A writer upon the theatre has tersely said: "The good self of the actor's personality must for the time being be lost in the evil self of the character acted. And what an effect is this! The greater the actor, the completer the transference of self and the profounder the evil!" To illustrate this, he cites the following description by a noted authoress, a novelist, of the manner in which the "hellish transformation" appeared to possess an equally celebrated actress when performing her part in a certain tragedy.

"For a while—a long while—I thought it was only a

woman, though a unique woman, who moved in might and grace before this multitude. By and by I recognized my mistake. Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength —for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the story deepened, how wildly they shook her with the passions of the pit! They wrote Hell on her straight, haughty brow. They turned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and murder and madness incarnate, she stood." I think it will be admitted that such power or genius for Satanic transformation is all too dearly acquired.

Evil transferred to its impersonator.

A recent English writer computes that one of the most widely known of English actors—one who is a champion for the reformation of the stage—has committed at least fifteen thousand murders upon the theatre's boards; that another has been divorced nearly three thousand times on the stage; and others (named) in the personation of sundry stage characters have been some thousands of times "foully betrayed, deserted, or abducted." Hence, we may with pertinency ask, whether it can be possible for the moral nature of the portrayers of these terrible offenses to pass, even measurably, uncontaminated through all this evil simulation.

A London serial (*Echoes from Paris*) published in the interest of Christian work in the French capital, refers to

the opening of a Home for "respectable English ballet-girls in Paris," and prints from the well-known journal, *Figaro*, some remarks by one of the editors of the latter upon the actresses' calling. This writer shows that the public concerns itself not at all as to the effect of stage acting upon those whose paid occupation it is to please:

Figaro's opinion of the actresses' calling.

"It wants to laugh or to cry, often both at once; and it does not trouble itself about the consequences. * * * To be a really clever performer, and very few are such, the various passions of a woman's nature cannot be represented by one who has not felt them. If I do not express an absolute fact, it is at least remarkable that the lives of all the great actresses have been full of intrigues; and it may even be said that the greater they were, the freer the life they led. The history of the theatre, from its origin to our own times, tends to prove this."

It will serve to point the moral of this part of my subject if I advert to the tragic end of the playwright, Salmi Morse, an event which happened while these notes were in preparation. Repeatedly defeated in his purpose of having the "Passion Play" performed before a New York audience—for both the public at large and the judicial

The "Passion Play" of Salmi Morse.

authorities had declared it to be a subject without the pale of scenic representation —overwhelmed with debt, and filled with a remorse which led him to wish that the Almighty would put an end to his unhappy life, he at last cast himself into the Hudson (some

said the hand of an enemy pushed him in) and thus perished miserably.*

It is surely not necessary to multiply condemnatory testimony such as that which has been given, coming as it in part does from those who have been, or who now are, enabled to speak from dearly earned experience. We will turn next—it may be hoped with profit—to something said in defense of the stage, being the separate comments of three writers—actors, playwrights, or stage-managers—upon a brief arraignment of the theatre by J. M. Buckley, editor of the Methodist *Christian Advocate*, of New York City. The four articles are printed in connection, in the *North American Review* for the Sixth month, 1883.

Some extracts from J. M. Buckley's paper will be first in order. Giving in a few lines his own experience, he says: "The writer in the most susceptible period of his life was fascinated by the theatre. The time was short, but the fever ran high, and during his attendance he saw some of the most noted actors who have appeared during the last thirty years, a few of whom are still in the front ranks of their profession. The sneers at religion and straight-laced bigots which certain comedies contained embittered him toward a life

Experience and views of J. M. Buckley.

* "And because the piously introduced custom of representing to the people the venerable passion of Christ the Lord, and the glorious combats of martyrs and acts of the saints, is brought to such a pass by the perverseness of men that it is an offense to many, and likewise a matter of much derision and contempt to many: we therefore decree, that from henceforth the passion of our Saviour be no more acted neither in any sacred nor profane place, but that it be learnedly and gravely declared by the preachers in such sort as that they may stir up piety and tears in the auditors."—*Council of Milan, A. D.* 1560.

of piety. The excitement of the evening unfitted him for the serious pursuit of his business. He lost relish for lectures and solid reading; a semi-tragical extravagance with an infusion of comical slang, affected his action and expression; while the company he found there was such as to destroy all interest in the society of steady persons."

Following prior writers on the topic, J. M. Buckley shows that, inasmuch as the success of a theatrical entertainment depends upon its power to excite attention and kindle strong emotion, it is any or all of the long array of evil dispositions and wickednesses which find such ready representation, and not, or rarely not, the quiet virtues of "truth, honesty, temperance, industry, frugality, chastity, religion," which are not readily representable on the stage so as to satisfy the sense of high excitement which is clamored for. The witticisms will be vulgar or broadly indecent, while the attitude assumed and the general behavior of those engaged in acting out the vices will be broadly at variance with that Christian decorum and sobriety of demeanor to which every one is called.

"The result," he continues, "of an examination of more than sixty of the plays which have been performed in the principal theatres of New York within recent years —copies prepared for the use of the actors being used— shows that if language and sentiments which would not be tolerated among respectable people in private intercourse, and would excite indignation if addressed to the

most uncultivated and coarse servant-girl, not openly vicious, by an ordinary young man, and profaneness which would brand him who uttered it as irreligious, are improper amusements for the young and for Christians of every age, at least fifty of the sixty plays above referred to must be condemned." He gives some details of the plots of several of them, but it will suffice merely to cite what he says in brief of two of the public's favorite dramas, that "—— consists of infidelity, adultery, murder, re-marriage, and the subsequent re-appearance of the first wife to die in the house of her former husband. —— is a succession of hypocrisy, covetousness, drinking, gambling, jealousy, and infidelity, tending to impart a view of life to the young which, if taken as true, would lead to distrust, misanthropy, and personal recklessness."

Hence, the above writer sees no probability of a reformation of the stage, because its reform has been called for for centuries and never been accomplished, it having always existed under conditions which forbid the hope of reform; the same morbid demand for delineation of vice continues; and finally, as the pecuniary success of the play is of the first moment to the playwright and manager, and as "nine-tenths of the theatre-going public call for the present order of plays, they will get what they call for or the management must fail."

To this serious arraignment, the first of the theatre defenders, replying, is frank enough to say that the present condition of the drama is "a subject for regret," and that many of the plays "are open to the severest criti-

cism," yet he thinks that there has been some noticeable improvement, and "that the attitude of the Christian public generally is much more liberal toward the theatre and theatrical people than [formerly], and that actors as such are not now excluded from good society on account of their calling,"—an asseveration which (if correct) can hardly be received as hopefully indicating the right estimation of this pursuit by the professing Church. He further asserts that, it being the province of the stage to amuse and instruct, vice is indeed exhibited to the intent that goodness may thereby be taught by comparison: surely a dangerous position to hold, and such as no concerned parent would bring forward as an excuse for having permitted his sons to seek the companionship of profane and immoral boys.

A formal plea for the theatre.

The second theatre defender takes a more hopeful view of stage morals, and claims that "the attendance is of a more refined class and far larger than it ever was before" —a claim, as to the latter part, which, though unhappily too true, proves nothing as to the righteousness of the thing pleaded for. And though it be said that the English sovereign herself gives countenance to the stage, and has chosen to take under her special patronage the writer of the play of "Pinafore," yet how sorrowful the reflection that the Queen's youngest son, the late Prince Leopold, came to his end (if the cable dispatch be correct) in a theatre after attendance at a ball, and that the intelligence reached his oldest

The plea of respectability.

brother, the Prince of Wales—a notorious theatre-goer —when the latter was present at a race-course. Neither regal nor refined society can elevate the ball and the theatre above the low plane where the Bible places them.

In stating that some of the most violent enemies of the stage are those whose sermons are rather acted than preached, whose dissertations are "often greeted with unseemly laughter and applause, and their salaries are regulated by the success they achieve in drawing audiences," this writer conveys a reproof which it were well that some who claim to be prophets of the Most High should heed. Further, in giving expression to the opinion that the stage does no more than is done by works of fiction in showing up wickedness, he only places the two in that near connection which Friends have always claimed that they occupied; and this point is emphasized when he alludes to the character of some of the fiction to be found in "Sunday-school" libraries. Here, too, are stumbling-blocks which the professing Church of Christ ought speedily to remove.

Ministerial "staginess" and Sunday-school fiction.

The last of these apologists for the stage makes much of the forbearance of playwrights and stage performers in not "showing up" clergymen of proved wickedness as they deserve to be, arguing from thence that theatrical representations and the actors therein should be handled with corresponding lenity. It seems scarcely worth while to follow this pleader's argument, for he,

like Cibber and Garrick, would defend the acknowledged immoralities of the stage upon the ground of their presentation being the fault of the public in clamoring for plays of the most debasing sort. Nevertheless, when he discourses of the high intellectual standard and pure moral condition of the "legitimate" stage, instancing a theatre in this city where "the stage took excellent shape," I am enabled specifically to reply (citing a memorandum of some years since, which it now seems singular to me that I should have made)—"It was publicly stated a few weeks ago that a play had just been enacted at the theatre of first repute in this city which, some years ago, the censors of even the city of Paris refused to license." Clearly it cannot be safe to follow the way of these easy advisers and defenders of that which is indefensible, who may have need, above many, to consider the Scripture caution that "he that diggeth a pit shall fall into it, and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

The legitimate stage examined.

One of the latest essays upon the theatre is an eighty-two page tractate entitled "Plain Talks about the Theatre," by the Presbyterian minister, Herrick Johnson. The writer gives a brief historical account of the stage, showing how the law of deterioration as to dramatic representations found illustration in the case of the Greeks, Romans, and Hindoos, and afterward, with respect to the modern European and American stage, which had its rise during the middle ages. Humbling to our claim to superior civilization and morals is his affirmation that

neither in China nor Japan are women allowed to perform. H. Johnson also shows how the several attempts at reformation of the theatre in England and America have signally failed, the efforts being spasmodic and rendered nugatory by the popular demand for dramas of the sensational and better-paying character; and he hence concludes that, "supported by the record of the past and present, by the very nature of theatrical representations, and by the necessities of the case, the stage, as an institution, *has within itself the seeds of corruption, and exists only under a law of degeneracy*."

The stage, as existing "under a law of degeneracy."

Confirming his assertion as to the vileness of the very large majority of stage plays by specific references to the plots of a number of the most popular, we are fully prepared to conclude, with Wesley, that the theatre is "the sink of all profaneness and debauchery," or, with Archbishop Tillotson, that it is "the devil's chapel, a nursery of licentiousness and vice." Vehement in his opposition to the theatre was that eminent jurist, Sir Matthew Hale; Wilberforce was equally its foe; whilst even the infidel Rousseau is found exclaiming, "Where would be the prudent mother who would dare to carry her daughter to this dangerous school? and what respectable woman would not think herself dishonored by going there?" To which I add this faithful denunciation of our Dr. Rush: "I will never publish to the world by going to the theatre that I think Jesus Christ is a hard master and religion

Estimate by Wesley, Tillotson, Hale, Wilberforce, Rousseau, and Rush.

an unsatisfying portion, which I should do if I went to the devil's ground in quest of happiness."*

It may be now pertinent to say something concerning the views of our own religious Society upon this subject. Thomas Clarkson, an Episcopalian, having given *in extenso*, in his "Portraiture of Quakerism," the reasons why the Friends condemn the theatre, sums up the argument as follows:

Clarkson on Quakers and the Theatre.

"Here we are taught that though dramatic pieces had no censurable origin, the best of the ancient moralists condemned them. We are taught that, even in the most favorable light in which we can view them, they have been thought objectionable; that is, that where they have pretended to teach morality, they have inculcated rather the virtue of heathenism than the strict, though mild, morality of the Gospel; and where they have attempted to extirpate vice, they have done it rather by making it appear ridiculous, than by teaching men to avoid it as evil or for the love of virtue. We are taught that, as it is our duty to love our neighbor and to be solicitous for his spiritual welfare, we ought not, under a system which requires simplicity and truth, to encourage him to be what he is not, or to personate a character which is not his own. We are taught that it is the general tendency of the diversions of the stage, by holding out false morals and

*To an excellent tract styled "Can I Attend the Theatre?" by A. L. O. W., published by the American Tract Society, and well-adapted for general circulation, I am indebted for the above quotations and some other matter which occurs in this essay.

prospects, to weaken the sinews of morality; by disqualifying for domestic enjoyments, to wean from a love of home; by accustoming to light thoughts and violent excitements of the passions, to unfit for the pleasures of religion. We are taught that diversions of this nature particularly fascinate, and that if they fascinate they suggest repetitions. And, finally, we are taught that the early Christians on their conversion, though before this time they had followed them as among the desirable pleasures of their lives, relinquished them on the principles now explained."

Upon the single point as to dissimulation and opposition to truth which stage-acting involves—a very important point, indeed, because "without" the eternal city are "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie"—I quote from Clarkson's argument in full:

"They [the Friends] hold it also to be contrary to the spirit of Christianity. For men who personate characters in this way express joy and grief when in reality there may be none of these feelings in their hearts. They express noble sentiments, when their whole lives may have been remarkable for their meanness, and go often afterward and wallow in sensual delights. They personate the virtuous character to-day, and perhaps to-morrow that of the rake, and, in the latter case, they utter his profligate sentiments and speak his profane language. Now Christianity requires simplicity and truth. It allows no man to pretend to be what he is not; and it requires great

Play-acting specially condemned because of its violating the truth.

circumspection of its followers with respect to what they may utter, because it makes every man accountable for his idle words. The Quakers, therefore, are of opinion that they cannot, as men either professing Christian tenets or Christian love, encourage others to assume false characters or to personate those which are not their own."

In another place Clarkson says respecting the Friends of his day: "I know of no people who regard *truth* more than the Quakers. Their whole system leads and directs to truth. One of the peculiarities of their language, or their rejection of many of the words which other people use—because they consider them as not religiously appropriate to the objects of which they are the symbols—serves as a constant admonition to them to speak the truth."

Tried by this tenet, therefore, and with no need to seek for any other objection, the "false frenzies" of stage-players (as Bernard styles them) must be abundantly condemned by those claiming fellowship with the religious Society of Friends. Indeed, it was very much upon this ground that, four and twenty centuries ago, Solon denounced the actor's profession as "tending, by its simulation of false character and by its expression of sentiment not genuine or sincere, to corrupt the integrity of human dealings." Upon the same principle did Rousseau frankly condemn the stage. "It is," says he, "the art of dissimulation; of assuming a foreign character, and

Bernard and Rousseau against false frenzies.

of appearing differently from what a man really is; of flying into a passion without a cause, and of saying what he does not think as naturally as if he really did; in a word, of forgetting himself, to personate others."

Accompanying this personation is the frequent profanity involved, in word and in attitude. A lady gave this as the immediate cause impelling her to renounce the theatre: "As she beheld actors fall upon their knees, and in simulated devotion offer up prayers to Heaven, a revelation of both subject and surroundings suddenly flashed upon her."

Profanity of simulated prayer.

It must have been near the time that Clarkson was penning his "Portraiture" that Elizabeth Fry (then Gurney), going up from Norwich to London, was afforded opportunity by her father to enter upon a previously arranged season of gayety in the pleasure-loving city. Sprightly and very much admired though she was, she had but a short time previously been brought to reflect with seriousness upon the tendency of her then course of life through listening to the preaching of William Savery, from Philadelphia. In her journal, which she began early to keep, she says at this time (1798) in commenting upon a visit to the theatre:

Elizabeth Fry renounces the theatre.

"I own I enter into the gay world reluctantly. I do not like plays. I think them so artificial that they are to me not interesting, and all seem so, so very far from pure virtue and nature. There is acting, music, scenery to perfection; but I was glad when it was over."

Obedient to the heavenly vision, she immediately thereafter wholly gave up attending public places of amusement, for she afterward averred—"I saw they tended to promote evil, led many from the path of rectitude, and brought them into much sin." Consider the loss not only to "Outcast London" but to the world at large, had Elizabeth Fry come to a different decision, and concluded that the theatre, being intended to "amuse and instruct," it was little worth while for her—a mere girl of seventeen—to disturb herself over the wretchedness of the metropolis or the ills of a world which it must be quite out of her power to mend or measurably alleviate. How little she knew then that in turning away from the theatre she should ever by an act of hers give occasion for such a remark as that which was made by a certain nobleman, who, seeing how she addressed the women felons at Newgate, and how reaching were her pathetic words, observed that it was the "deepest *tragedy*" he had ever witnessed.

Showing a like apprehension of the unsatisfying nature of the world's entertainments was the experience of Mary Capper, who at the age of twenty-one—being then a member of the Established Church of England—came to London from her parent's home at Rugeley, Staffordshire. She was on her way to France for the benefit of her health. She says (1776):

"My brother Jasper called and took us to dine with my brother William. After we had coffee we called a coach, intending to go and spend the evening with my

uncle Capper, in Berkeley Square, but an unaccountable whim entering the head of my brother William (prompted, I have no doubt, by his wish to give us pleasure), he asked if we should have any objection to see the opera to be performed that night. I was inclined to refuse, but fancying that my friend had a desire to hear [the actress-singer], I accompanied her without reluctance. My disappointment and disgust are not to be described; I had heard much of the shining qualities of [the actress], and therefore expected something extraordinary; but of all the figures I ever saw she is the most miserable, and her impudence is inconceivable In the midst of my chagrin, I could not help feeling emotions of pity for the poor, unhappy wretch, who, in her serious moments, must call to mind a life spent in such a manner; how melancholy a retrospect! I may truly say, my intended pleasure was turned into actual pain. I was very ill afterward." And so this dedicated handmaid of the Lord, whose helpful letters from the quiet rural home of her later life must have been blessed to many of those who received them, was likewise preserved for a better purpose than that of following the world's alluring pleasures.

Experience of Mary Capper.

Very like a companion piece to the foregoing—the place being Paris instead of London—was the experience in this matter of the late Christine Alsop (then Majolier), who, at the age of twenty-two, being on her way from the South of France to the home of William Allen, in England, stopped for a brief rest in Paris. She was ac-

companied by a brother. Having gone to the same hotel as the one selected by two of their traveling companions in the diligence, they accepted the invitation of these acquaintances (Christine reluctantly) to go with them to the Theatre Français. Observing the dissipated looks of those around her, she felt a sort of horror at being in such a place, and thus instructively remarks:

"I durst not ask to go out, but I was very unhappy. I felt ashamed that any one should see my Friend's bonnet, so I took it off and put it under the seat. The dresses, both of the men and women, were such as I was ashamed to see. Then followed one of the worst of the representations. I shut my eyes and dared not look, and at my solicitation our friends left the place. I have never forgotton the circumstance or my impressions at that time; and I have often felt glad that the scene was of such a description, because my judgment was then quite settled; and though some who are in the practice of attending such places have often tried to persuade me to go, telling me that my judgment was formed on the worst example possible, I have never felt at liberty to do so, persuaded as I am that if those who do attend these places are not shocked, it is because they have been led to it by degrees, and that if a woman's modesty *can be thus blunted*, the influence must be unfavorable on her mind."

Experience of Christine Majolier.

To which I would add the remark that when any, in going to a place of entertainment, find themselves tempted to cast aside the plain or simple attire which

they may have customarily worn, let them consider how they are therein departing from the truth and treading upon ground whereon they feel that Christ cannot bear them company.

The writer may be allowed briefly to add, with respect to his own experience (being previous to his uniting in membership with a religious society), that his great fondness for music drew him into attendance at the opera, which he held to be less objectionable than the theatre. Nevertheless, being one evening on his way to an entertainment of this kind, and but a few steps from his home in the city, he was met in the way by the merciful Spirit of Christ, who gave him to see that by attendance at such a place—though accounted the first of its class—he was countenancing performances concerning which he would have no peace were his own brother or sister, or other loved relative or friend, among the singers and actors; that it was not a resort where humble, godly people were likely to be found, and therefore could not be a safe resort for him; that the habit was an expensive one, as well as wasteful of time, and that it was one which was growing upon him. Immediately turning about, so effectually was he convinced, that (he can gratefully say) he never again attended the opera, or even had a desire to do so.

Attending the opera gives countenance to the ballet.

It will not be out of place to say here, respecting the plea of many "church-going" people whose musical tastes lead them to attend the opera, yet who would not be seen at a theatre, that the *ballet* is an invariable, or

almost invariable, accompaniment of the rendition of opera. In giving assent, therefore, to an unseemly public display so morally damaging to the performers as is the ballet, they must, if they have given the matter any serious thought at all, be doing despite to the spirit of grace in their hearts, unless, indeed, that God-given monitor and preserver from the world's evils has already ceased to be tender.

Woman's appearance upon the stage, it will be freely admitted, did not reform it. Among the ancient Greeks the actors were invariably males—women being excluded from witnessing comedies, though admitted to tragedies. Women were, and I believe still are, prohibited as actors upon the Chinese stage; while in Europe they did not so appear until the seventeenth century—first, in France, and, a little later, in England, in the reign of Charles the Second. Of old, the dance of the daughter of Herodias compassed the death of the prophet who proclaimed the coming of the Son of God: in this generation, none may number the slain of the ballet and of woman's other immodest and degrading appearances in the public play-house. Viewing the signal dishonor thus done the sex, it would seem as though there might in this connection, and in connection with the demoralizing literature of the day, be a field for dedicated labor by woman in woman's behalf, which has hitherto been not much occupied.

Woman's appearance on the stage did not reform it.

While it is, I know, the boast of those who move in fashionable life that they are well-versed in fiction, and

that they would hold themselves quite disgraced could they not say they had seen the chief plays and heard all the noted singers in opera, yet a better record for any Christian will it be if it can be said of such a one what was said of the pious Nonna by her son, the celebrated Gregory Nazianzen, who, enumerating her virtues, began with this,—"That she never visited the theatre."

The pious Nonna no theatre-goer.

Leaving individual experiences, let us next consider the character of some of the temptations through which the young are led to attend the theatre, as well as some of the results following therefrom. To quote again from the tract, "Can I Attend the Theatre?": "The present director of the city prison in Paris says: 'If a new play of a vicious character has been put on the boards, I very soon find it out by the number of young fellows who come into my custody.' * * '*Oh, that theatre!*' said the agonized mother of a felon son; 'he was a virtuous, kind youth till that theatre proved his ruin.' The inevitable effect of the play-house is the corruption of youth. Prof. Knowles states that at a juvenile prison it was ascertained that a large proportion of the boys began their career in vice by stealing money to buy theatre tickets; and a keeper of a juvenile prison in Boston gave testimony that 'of twenty young men confined for crime, seventeen confessed that they were first tempted to steal by a desire to purchase tickets to visit the theatre.' Who has not seen famished-looking boys scanning with keen interest the glaring bills

The theatre an inciter to crime.

that disfigure our streets, and apparently resolving, by fair means or foul, to gain admittance to the play! Of fifteen young men from the country, employed in a publishing house in New York, thirteen, within a few years, were led to destruction by the play-house."

But what led these boys to desire to attend the play? In very many cases they were doubtless brought to it by the morally-destructive reading matter which they habitually handled; for true it is that there are thousands of our youth whose literature is limited to the recitals of crime. Says a writer in a Methodist weekly of recent date: "While visiting the State Prison in Indiana, a short time ago, the chaplain of the institution told me that out of one hundred and twenty-one prisoners who were then confined in the prison inclosure, and who were convicted before they became of age, ninety-two attributed their crimes and consequent convictions to the fact of their minds having been corrupted and poisoned by reading the vile and false papers and books that are to be everywhere found throughout this land to-day."

The agency of pernicious literature.

The process of making bad boys with rapidity is graphically told as follows by a local paper in commenting upon late disorderly occurrences by lads of Milwaukee—not acted upon "the boards," but in real life. I presume no excuse need be offered for its insertion, as the item brings us nearer to the causes which impel to theatre-going. The excerpt is but one of scores giving information of a similar tenor which might be

culled in a short time from the columns of the daily press.

"The small boys in Milwaukee have risen in their cunning and in their might and carried consternation to the heart of every householder. Within the past month there have been nine incendiary fires within a single ward of that city, where the small boys have a Buffalo Bill organization. According to the despatches, the city is virtually in a state of siege. The police force has been doubled, a tower watch has been erected by the direction of the Fire Chief, the Chief of Police is in receipt of letters threatening him with assassination, the local underwriters are holding daily meetings, and they and Mayor Stowell are offering special rewards for the detection of the incendiaries. All this in the great German town, that has heretofore boasted of being the most beer-drinking and the most orderly community of its size on the continent! This state of things is a sad commentary upon the sort of literature on which Milwaukee's humorist has been bringing up the boys of the vicinage. He has sown the wind and now he is reaping the whirlwind of bad boys. His seemingly harmless pleasantries, in which the pranks of precocious mischief are made the source of indulgent laughter, seem to be having an unexpected result. George W. Peck, who, we believe, before he became a professional humorist, was himself the Chief of Police in a Western city, ought to be put under bonds not to write any more books or stories about bad boys."

The process of educating the youthful mind to a liking for the pantomine, comedy, and other theatricals by feeding it upon such pabulum as comic papers, silly and grotesquely illustrated magazine articles, and the like, is not difficult to perceive. A judicious parent, if he deems it worth while to advert to the odd or simply ludicrous pranks of his little ones, will generally take occasion to speak of these droll performances when the subjects of them are not present. When we get beyond what is only humorous, and take up with silly exaggerations and distortions of the truth, we offend against the Scripture injunction as to our yea and nay, and are welcoming that which "cometh of evil." So, when a fondness for mimicry and playing practical jokes has been developed in their boys, the parents of these may be sure that the safety-line has been passed, and that prayerful solicitude and active counteracting efforts are more in place than is "indulgent laughter."

Connection between juvenile pranks and overt crime.

The connection which I am endeavoring to show is apparent in such items of daily intelligence as this: Six child burglars, nine to twelve years of age, were arrested in Paterson, New Jersey. They constituted a regularly organized band, and when arrested were on their way from a cheap theatre.

What will they have probably seen at the cheap theatre? This flashy advertising sheet (which claims a circulation of five hundred thousand), profusely illustrated with pictures of brigand-looking heroes and Indians dashing headlong over the plains, will tell us. It is an invitation

to the play of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West—America's National Entertainment," giving details of "the startling and soul-stirring attack on the Deadwood mail-coach by Indians," and a promise of marvelous representations of free life on the frontier, well calculated to turn the heads of errant boys and set them upon lives of adventure and crime. That this story and play have had precisely this effect, the late abundant police captures of lads going West with stolen money in their pockets, pistols and knives in their belts, and dime novels and pictures of actors as part of their limited baggage, sufficiently attest.

This "City of Brotherly Love" was, last New Year's Day (1884), the field of such a display of masqueraders, mostly boys, as would seem to indicate how general must have been their acquaintance with stage representations. Before noon of the previous day two hundred and four permits to parade had been issued by the Mayor to as many clubs and social organizations, who, accordingly, in their fantastic attire, representative of clowns, harlequins, mimics, etc., paraded and capered around in a manner which should have called for the shedding of tears by the beholders rather than for that indulgence in merriment or other exhibition of approval which was too generally evoked. One of these hilarious, reckless crews I met—lads of perhaps eight to eighteen years of age, and about twenty in number. They had halted at the side door of a liquor-saloon, and noisily accepting the invitation of the laughing proprietor to step within, sat down to the long

Juvenile masqueraders.

lunch table, while the chuckling rum-dealer—his arms a-kimbo as he smiled upon the young recruits whom he had gathered into his den—only leered a response to the warning not to deal them out any beer or other intoxicating drink. Asking myself how the fathers and mothers of at least some of those boys would have felt had they seen this saddening sight, I could only turn away with the scarcely suppressed ejaculation, "How long, O Lord! must such things be?"

A few weeks later there appeared in one of our dailies a communication from a mother, signing herself "Anxious Heart," in which counsel was craved on account of her wayward son, a lad of fifteen, who persisted in running the streets with bad boys and in spending his wages at places of amusement. Here we behold the other side of the merry-andrew's picture, which the amused public cares not at all to see.

I would plead here with those parents, who, with true love for their offspring, desire them to escape the hurtful publications, theatre-going, and other contaminations of a "world lying in wickedness," to see to it that they themselves set a good example in testifying (among other things) against the purveyors of pernicious literature. The proprietor of a news-stand near a much-frequented railroad depot, upon being mildly expostulated with by the writer for offering low papers like the *Police Gazette* for sale, defiantly responded that he would sell anything the law allowed him to. Not patronizing the owners of stands where such debasing publications are kept may

at times cause one to go out of his way for his customary paper, or even to miss getting it altogether; yet I cannot doubt but that a Christian, jealous of the honor of his Master, is as much called to submit to so trifling a sacrifice, as he is to keep away from saloons where vile liquors are handed over the counter. And if it be said that this is too slight a matter to make an issue about—that there is here very little of letting one's "light shine"—I reply that there is, nevertheless, a reward promised by the Highest for the least act of dedication done (not as of works, but of grace) unto Him in secret. It was said by Fenelon: "He who learns, by Divine assistance, to make a right application in small matters of a spiritual nature will not fail to accumulate much treasure, as well as will he who is attentive in temporal concerns."

Faithful testifying against pernicious literature needed.

Likewise should the parent exercise the same discrimination as to the character of the daily paper which he brings to or has served at his home. There are few editors or publishers of such papers who keep posted in their offices (and who, upon penalty of dismissal, insist upon its observance) a notice like this, which is to be found in the office of a daily in one of our large cities; "Nothing shall appear in the columns of the Daily News which a young lady may not with propriety read aloud before a mixed company." According to the *Christian Weekly:* "An examination recently made showed that in the five leading New York morning papers, excluding the market reports and shipping news, an average of

thirty per cent. of the space given to reading-matter was devoted to accounts of murders, suicides, and crimes of every grade, dressed up in all the circumstantial details possible to be obtained." Knowing, therefore, what must be the result upon the impressible minds of the young of the regular reading of a mass of such details, the parent who has a concern for the moral training of his children will be always anxious when he sees them with a newspaper (unselected by himself) in hand.

We therefore reach the point that back of the bad reading which stimulates to theatre-going and overt crime, there is an absence of that parental restraint and tender concern which ought to prevail, so that it is in a great measure owing to this lack of care that these hurtful habits are permitted to be formed and to get the mastery. Nevertheless, when the attempt is made to discover all the causes of crime commission, especially in a great city, we need to consider the temptations of the drinking-saloon; the pool, billiard, and gambling rooms; the working in factories, with (in very many cases) the demoralizing associations connected therewith; the contaminating influences of close crowding in tenement-houses,—all of these, and others unnamed, in connection with the pernicious reading and the low theatres and music-halls already remarked upon. When we weigh all these influences thus working toward the reinforcement of the kingdom of Satan, we are prepared to admit that a great deal of

Absence of parental restraint.

effort may be expended, only to be largely counteracted by the overpowering evil.

Thus, Judge Bulstrode, of Middlesex County, England (in which county is the city of London), expressed the opinion in a jury charge that one play-house ruins more souls in a single year than fifty churches save. In the report of the Howard Association, of London, for the year 1880, it was stated on the authority of the chaplain of Clerkenwell Prison, that "out of fifty boys sent to the prison from the ages of 9½ to 16 years, forty-eight had been Sunday-school scholars; that forty-two of these had attended regularly, and twenty-nine had received prizes. Now, either the instruction had been very defective, or it must have been nullified by evil influences."

Further, the methods of attempted cure may be very unwisely and mischievously employed. For example, a wealthy tobacco manufacturer in one of our cities has recently established a large free library and reading-room for his employes, with the object, as stated, of furnishing them "a place where they can pleasantly and profitably spend their Sundays and evenings without cost." In so far as the undertaking is indicative of a feeling of real and generous sympathy on the part of the employer for his work-people, it is to be altogether commended; but as we learn that "in addition, there are playing-cards, chess, dominoes, and other games," the good resultant from the enterprise will be likely to be counterbalanced by that which does not tend to profit. A late writer in a London magazine, discours-

ing upon the prolific theme of the poor of the world's metropolis, recommends that the factory girls, etc., be afforded opportunities for indulging in dancing, gratuitous music being likewise furnished. The well-to-do, argues this reasoner, have their high-priced theatres and fancy balls; the poor should not be deprived of their free music and dancing. Such alleviations may suit those, whether the rich or the poverty-stricken, whose ken does not consider the never-ending life beyond the grave for which present preparation needs to be made; yet the one message of George Fox, John Wesley, and Rowland Hill, to all alike, in London or otherwheres, was that the Gospel was commanded to be preached, and that, accepting its free proffers of forgiveness and mercy, all might know "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and be partakers of the "joy that is past finding out." With the love of God in the heart, and a tempered and purified purpose, content to do the Master's bidding within the narrow way, the sad problem of city life among the lowly might be solved, and the promise of Scripture be fulfilled, that "one [shall] chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight."

Wise and unwise correctives.

In an article upon "Centres of Spiritual Activity," published the past winter by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, there occurs an interesting account of carefully-planned work which is carried on (by the Friends) in connection with the Bedford Institute, London. The following extract may throw some light upon the problem how best to combat the attractions of the play-house:

"For wet weather and winter months, the libraries, lectures, discussion classes, and similar occupations are rendered available. Occasionally, industrial exhibitions are held; and these are found to be among the very best means of promoting recreation and amusement in connection with home and family life. The Friends do not encourage theatres or dancing parties, as tending in their view rather to foster pleasure-loving habits unfavorable to domestic comfort and contentment; but by offering prizes to be competed for by men and women, children and adults, and including a large variety of handicraft work, as carpentry, cabinet work, metallurgy, carving, drawing, sewing, tailoring, cooking, collections of natural history objects, etc., there is secured for months before the exhibitions a widely diffused and deeply interested activity in many a home, which not only keeps the workers out of mischief, but draws forth their skill and ability, affords them a prolonged pleasure in the midst of their families, and ultimately meets with the sympathizing appreciation of many of their friends and neighbors."

I believe that all the Churches commonly called evangelical have declared their opposition to or have cautioned against attendance at the theatre; but it is lamentable to know that in many instances the proceeds of theatrical entertainments have not been refused by the religious bodies to whom they have been tendered. Here is another serious stumbling-block. It was Chrysostom who said, "The Church receives no

Receiving the proceeds of theatrical entertainments.

offerings from the injurious." In our own day there ought be no exception to the rule of refusal such as was held by George Müller, founder of the British orphan-houses, who, being proffered the proceeds of a theatre benefit, promptly returned the same as unlawful to be used in a religious cause, though he was at the time in great straits for money. The "Sunday Breakfast Association" of this city has more than once been tendered a theatrical entertainment for its benefit, but its president has said that he will in the future, as in the past, steadily refuse to be helped by any such methods.

Respecting legislation by the States or General Government upon this matter, the United States Congress, in 1778, adopted a resolution that stringent measures be taken to suppress theatrical entertainments, horse-racing, and gaming as being productive of idleness, dissipation, and general depravity of morals. It is not probable that any such resolution would be favorably reported now. Interesting in this connection is the following from the diary of Mary Capper, when in attendance at the Yearly Meeting, London, in 1794: "The men's meeting sent us for perusal a very interesting communication from Friends in America; some of whom, in considering the late awful visitation of some parts of that continent, were so deeply concerned for the general good that they had believed it required from them to represent to the rulers and persons in power the necessity for their exerting their authority to endeavor to suppress all public amusements, gaming, stage

U. S. Congress of 1778 against the theatre.

entertainments, and dram-shops, as being sources of much immorality and profaneness, widely estranging the mind from God and godliness."

As bearing on the phase of the subject just touched upon, it may be well to refer here to some matters relative to the drama in Great Britian in the time of Elizabeth and in the century succeeding. During Elizabeth's reign, in 1580, there was a partial suppression of the theatres. It is related that certain "godly citizens and well-disposed gentlemen, of London" brought such a pressure to bear upon the city magistrates that the latter petitioned the Queen to expel all players from London, and permit them to destroy every theatre within their jurisdiction. Their prayer was granted, so far as the several play-houses within the boundaries of the city proper were concerned, they being "quite put down and suppressed by these religious senators."

Suppression of the theatre in England.

Again, at the time of the Civil War in England, the drama had a hard struggle for existence. An act of Parliament (1642), in view of the disturbances in both England and Ireland, provided, among other things, as a "possible means to appease and avert the wrath of God appearing in these judgments," that "whereas public sports do not well agree with public calamities, nor public stage-plays with the season of humilation, *this* being an exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and *the other* being spectacles of pleasure too commonly expressing lascivious mirth and levity; it is therefore thought fit

and ordered by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament assembled, that while these sad causes and set times of humiliation do continue, public stage-plays cease and be forborne."

This suppressive law not sufficing, in 1647 a more stringent act was passed, by which it was enacted that "all stage-players, and players of interludes and common plays are and shall be taken for rogues, whether they be wanderers or not, and notwithstanding any license whatsoever from the King or any other person or persons to that purpose." This protective measure seemed to operate with fair success for awhile, but, when Charles the Second came in a few years later, the drama was fully restored and legalized.

It is to be remarked that, whenever the plague made its appearance in London, the drama was under a cloud; upon the decrease of the pestilence, it reappeared. In Sir Henry Herbert's Office-book occurs the following memorandum: "On Thursday morning, the 23d of February, the bill of the plague made the number of forty-four, upon which decrease the King gave the players their liberty, and they began the 24th of February, 1636. The plague increasing, the players lay still until the 2d of October, when they had leave to play."

Stage-playing forbidden during the plague.

Although the closing of the theatres was rigidly enjoined during the Great Plague (1666), those resorts were re-opened with alacrity as soon as it appeared that the immediate manifestation of the Divine judgment was

passing away. Thus Pepys says in his diary under date Eleventh month 20th: "To church, it being Thanksgiving-day for the cessation of the plague; but the town do say, that it [the day] is hastened before the plague is quite over, there being some people still ill of it, but only to get ground of plays to be publicly acted, which the bishops would not suffer till the plague was over."* As did Israel, so did they: "In the time of their trouble, when they cried unto Thee, Thou heardest them from Heaven, * * but after they had rest, they did evil again before Thee." (Neh. ix, 27, 28.)

Regarding Colonial and State action, it may serve the purpose of showing the laxity *now* prevailing with respect to the theatre, if the legal measures early taken against it in Pennsylvania only be cited. By the Great Law, as it was called, passed the year that Penn first came to his Province (1682), it was provided that "whosoever shall introduce into the Province or frequent such rude and riotous sports as Prizes, *Stage-plays*, *Masques*, Revels, Bull-Baiting, Cock-fightings, with such like, being convicted thereof, shall be reported and fined as breakers of the peace, and suffer at least ten days' imprisonment at hard labor in the House of Correction, or forfeit twenty shillings."

The theatre not wanted in early Pennsylvania.

This act was probably repealed by the Queen in Council prior to 1700, for in that year the colonists reenacted it. It was, notwithstanding, annulled by the

*Chambers' *Book of Days*, vol. 2, page 720.

royal Council, but re-enacted with righteous pertinacity by the Quaker Assembly the same year. In 1709 the Queen's Council again repealed it; the Assembly, undaunted, again enacted it the following year, only to be met by a further repeal three years later. Nevertheless, the moral sentiment of the Philadelphia community was so strongly opposed to theatres that it was not until 1749 that the first theatrical performances were given, and those were by an English company. Their unlawful procedure coming to the knowledge of the city authorities, the company was soon frightened off, and went to New York. In 1759 a permanent theatre was built,* to the great scandal of various congregations, who forthwith petitioned the Assembly, and in the *same year* ("where there's a will, there's a way") an act was passed which made it an indictable offense, punishable by a fine of five hundred pounds, to erect any play-house, theatre, stage, or scaffold for "acting or exhibiting any tragedy, comedy, or tragic-comedy, farce, interlude, or other play," or to be concerned in acting or exhibiting any such tragedy, etc. This act was likewise repealed by the King in council the next year, only to be re-enacted in the act of 1779, "for the suppression of vice and immorality." It is evident that the just sentiment of the community at large (and not that of the Friends only) was opposed to the play-house, as being a prime promoter of social debasement, for the Friends of the period

* The first regular play-house in the Colonies appears to have been set up at Williamsburg, in Virginia, only seven years before (1752).

of the Revolution were unrepresented in the Assembly by which this prohibitory law was enacted.*

In view of the fact that play-houses, even those of the vilest description, are everywhere allowed and licensed in our towns and cities, and that it would be in vain to look now for any municipal or State action, such as above detailed, there is something pathetic in the pertinacity with which this community strove again and again to turn aside—to keep away—that leprous invader, which the mother country, like an unnatural parent, endeavored with an unrelenting persistency to fasten upon it. What were the stamp act and the tax upon tea, as absolute grievances, to this? The tax might be lowered, or, by continuous, emphatic, and dignified protest, be eventually done away with; but, as for this canker of the play-house, assured were those old-time people that, did it once find legalized place, the leaven of its sorcery would so work in the community, that first a tolerating, then an altogether favoring, public opinion would be created, so that its ultimate dislodgment would be exceedingly improbable. Yes, it is here now, apparently more strongly entrenched, growing year by year more corrupt and vile, while the measure of the woe that it brings, who can fathom?

The theatre curse in Philadelphia.

* The Friends, in a corporate capacity, having several times unavailingly appealed to John Penn, the Lieutenant-Governor, finally (1770) forwarded an earnest address to Thomas and Richard Penn, the Proprietors. In it there occurs this reference confirmatory of the above statement: "The pious and most considerate of other religious denominations have, at times, for some years past, been repeatedly concerned to address the Governors you have placed here against the strolling-players who have come to this city."

Such large and continuous accessions to our population come to us from Europe—where (except in Great Britain) the theatres in the cities are far more thronged than are the church-edifices on the first day of the week—that, one after another, our American municipalities are succumbing to this ensnaring custom which obtains abroad. There may be instruction for us in taking a look at the custom as prevalent on the Continent of Europe, but I will instance only the city of Berlin, giving the concurrent testimony of two witnesses which happens to be at hand. One of these, an observant American resident, writes thus to *Friends' Review*.* Having shown how lightly esteemed is a day of rest and religious observance on the part of the people generally—for he estimates that only about twenty-five thousand in a population of a million frequent the places of worship—he proceeds:

The theatre's attraction in Berlin.

"The principal streets and parks swarm with human life. Picnic wagons, carriages, cabs, omnibuses, and horse-cars are called into utmost use, especially in the afternoon. Restaurants and beer gardens do their handsomest business. Puppet shows, comic plays, foolish songs, and horse races satisfy—how easily and miserably satisfied!—the uncultured irreligious during the afternoon upon the commons and sandy fields about the suburbs of the imperial capital, while brilliantly lighted music concerts, balls, theatres, and operas invite the *cultured* irreligious from the entertainment of friends with dinners

* No. 18, current volume.

and wines to closing pleasures of the great holiday—which day the comparatively few in this great [so-called] Christian land feel themselves called of God to keep as a holy day. The receptions of foreign ministers, diplomatists, and eminent personages at the Royal Court are the commonest occurrences of [First-day] afternoons, and State dinners and Ministerial consultations are by no means infrequent. The Imperial capital is referred to, but not exclusively; for other cities and towns imitate Berlin so far as they can in this respect.

"People who attend upon worship—I know such well-intended Christians—think it perfectly consistent to spend the evening at the opera or theatre. They have grown up with the habit and desire of theatre-going, and many of them have no scruple about practicing it on Sunday evening, and thus clearing their minds of any serious impressions they may have gathered from the morning worship. And unfortunately they can readily appeal for defense to the example of 'our good Emperor.' The Emperor is a pious man, no doubt; most people think so. He and his family usually set the good example of attendance on worship at the Royal Cathedral, and he is doubtless a devout worshiper of God.* But while he is at the

* Without desiring to unnecessarily except to the above writer's charitable opinion of the Emperor's piety—and I know it is the one commonly entertained—I would yet interpose here the plea of Isaiah, when he cried (iii, 12): "O my people! *they which lead thee* cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." Reiterating the charge, he says again (ix, 16: "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed." The foremost political representative of Protestantism in Germany, in thus habitually frequenting the play-house on that day of the week commonly set apart for rest and religious observance, contemns before all the people that

Royal Theatre or Royal Opera on Sunday evening, it may be witnessing the *best* and *purest* play, or opera—which is, for any day, not exactly commendable—would that he could only remember that thousands of his subjects, less informed, less cultured and even-tempered, less pious, are attending the most disreputable theatres and circuses. A great many of this poorer, illiterate class satisfy their appetites and baser desires at beer and dancing halls on this evening of the week, to the discomfort and grief of better thinking, religious people."

The testimony of the other witness, an editor of the *Christian Index*, accords with the foregoing, showing us the undesirable goal to which our American cities are tending—to which, indeed, some of them seem to have already attained.

"While Sunday," says the narrator in giving his own experience, "is partially observed until one o'clock, after that the day is given up to business and every form of worldly amusements and enjoyments. The stores are thrown open, men go into the field to rake their hay, visits are made and exchanged, beer saloons are crowded with both sexes, who sit for hours sipping their favorite beverage, while regaled with delightful music or amused with comic plays or gymnastic performances by traveling actors. Having surfeited themselves with eating and drinking, the younger part of the assembly repair to the

unassailable rule for the guidance of Christians of whatever degree—that they "live soberly, righteously, and godly." Court-preacher Stocker is, himself, authority for the statement that some parishes of one hundred and twenty thousand souls in the great German capital have but five pastors, and one of eighty thousand has only two.

ball-room and dance until the 'wee small hours' of Monday morn, then to a little repose before beginning the labors of another day. So with some. Others attend the theatre or opera, whose best pieces and best actors are reserved for and presented on Sunday. And these are attended by all classes and conditions of society, from the highest to the lowest, prices being arranged to suit each class and pocket. Here are found those who were at church in the morning, even the preacher often included. If a performance of unusual excellence is to take place in an adjoining town or city, special trains are run and crowds go to Meiningen, for example, where the theatre is most celebrated. * * * *

"The Germans are a fun-loving people, and have numerous 'fests' or festivals, lasting usually three or four days, sometimes two or three weeks, always including a Sunday, which is set apart as a 'big day.' This is particularly true of the 'Schuetzen Fest' (shooting feast). A large plat of ground is owned or leased by the society and rented out to be used for shops, beer saloons, circuses, menageries, Punch and Judy exhibitions, merry-go-rounds, and all kinds of shows. While these places are well attended through the week, Sunday is the great day, when visitors come from many miles around, and the time is spent in indescribable hilarity and excitement. I remember that the authorities at our Philadelphia Exposition would not permit the doors to be opened on Sunday. At the great exposition at Nuremberg, lasting several months, and the largest ever held in Germany,

Sunday was always the greatest day of all, when 'the world, the flesh, and the devil, all seemed in league to produce an effect which would far eclipse the gorgeous trappery of Bunyan's 'Vanity Fair.'"

Respecting our American cities, we at the East are, in the main, happily exempt from this wholesale misuse of the day of rest, so far as the opening of the theatres is concerned. In the West, however, where the infusion of the German nationality is large, there appears to be a rapid approach to (with too frequently an arrival at) the undesirable European model. It is within the memory of the writer that the city of New Orleans was spoken of as possessing a bad pre-eminence in that it was the only one in the Union where performances at the theatres on the first day of the week were openly tolerated. A recent writer in the New York *Independent*, who was a resident in the former city for some years previous to the breaking out of the late Civil War, testifies to the same fact.

"Sunday" theatre-going in Chicago.

If one will merely glance at the "Amusements" portion of a Western paper, such as that of the Chicago *Tribune* (published every day of the week), he will find whole columns filled with "Special Sunday advertisements" similar to the following: One theatre announces "The Lights of London," another promises "A Spectacular Melodrama," at the Grand Opera House will be given an entertainment by an "Opera Comique Company," at another place an "orchestra of forty performers" may be heard, at

still another the Great Chicago Museum and Theatre offers its varied attractions—and so on. Then there are the scores of still lower music halls and play-houses, whether advertised or not, which will be found in full blast. Hence, we need not seek to probe the repulsive depths of wickedness which these together present, to be assured that a city, so unmindful of the lesson of the awful fire-scourge which desolated it but a few years ago, is but heaping together an accumulation of iniquities which invite a sorrowful requital in the day of the Lord's visitation, when He shall make inquiry for the souls of those whom the abominations of Baal shall have overcome.

If we turn next to the "Queen City of the West," we observe the like manifestation of a spirit of religious indifference and of pleasure-seeking in the midst of trouble, exemplified during the calamitous period of the floods of this and of the preceding year. In vain do we look for that general bewailment and humbling of self which prostrated Nineveh of old at the preaching of Jonah and caused it to turn, for the time at least, repentant to the Lord. One of Cincinnati's papers, the *Western Christian Advocate*, writing last year soon after the occurrence of the destructive flood of that season, said—with respect to the dramatic and musical dissipation of its people—that "during the last few months there has been an extravagant, almost an insane, expenditure for the gratification of this predilection. * * But while all this is going on, there are hundreds of families in this city who have been in a sad state of pov-

Cincinnati and the lesson of its calamities.

erty ever since the flood, and for whom it has been extremely difficult to obtain proper food and clothing and shelter. * * The Children's Home, that not many years ago was the pet of the churches of the city, has been lately somehow made the beneficiary of a theatrical entertainment. * * The fact that now and then the proceeds of an operatic or dramatic entertainment are applied to a benevolent object does not, on the whole, make things better. Real benevolence is not increased; and the confused notions upon the subject of theatre-going which are induced by such gifts are obviously harmful to religion." Then, adverting to the thousands of flourishing whisky, wine, and beer saloons permitted in their midst, the article concludes—"what a spectacle all this to angels and men—religion struggling to lift up and purify; worldliness and extravagance seeking to consume wealth in selfish pleasures and excesses; drunkenness abounding, and the dregs of humanity blacker and more abundant."

Hence, whether one city or all cities, forgetful of God and unreached and unrepentant in the midst of His many mercies and mercifully directed judgments, be those whose awful punishment and irrecoverable fall are held up to us as that of the Babylon which John the Apostle saw, there is withal sore need to be re-sounded and heedfully kept in view what was prophetically uttered concerning the callous-hearted city, that, because "she saith in her heart, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no plagues,' therefore shall her plagues come in

one day, death and mourning and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. * * And the voice of harpers and musicians, and of pipers and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee."*

Since the above was written, the great riot at Cincinnati, with its accompaniment of killing, maiming, and burning, and the attempted release and threatened lynching of its "jailful of murderers," has taken place. Having had occasion last autumn to tarry a First-day in that city, I could not but notice the large number of open shops, and especially the liquor saloons with wide-open doors, many of them filled with young men and mere lads. Taking into consideration, therefore, the existence of this wholesale and unconcealed drinking habit, together with the fact that the theatres and music halls of all kinds are open *every* night of the week, while the Bible is banished from the public schools, it was obvious to the writer that the workers of evil were being multiplied there to an extremely dangerous extent. In Cleveland, again, the public school buildings are being used as dancing-halls, where the pupils may learn the alluring art of dancing, in place of the Bible, which has been expelled.

* The writer is very far from desiring to magnify the seriousness of the situation either in the cities named or in any others. Remembering that, in all our commercial centres, there are found those, and many of them, who are of "the salt of the earth," he would adopt the language of that gentle-hearted spirit who wrote of London in the midst of its abounding wickedness:

> "Ten righteous would have saved a city once,
> But thou hast many righteous—well for thee
> That salt preserves thee."

Now, it is recorded as a circumstance indicative of the reckless forgetfulness of Heaven which marked the moral condition of the French populace at the chaotic period of the Reign of Terror, that they proclaimed, among other liberties, that of the theatre; so that there were soon no less than five and twenty play-houses open in the city of Paris alone, where before there had been but six. It is a historical truth that in times of war, when men's passions are most stirred, and in the years immediately succeeding a war, when the wave of resultant demoralization is at its flood, that the play-houses in the cities are to an exceptional extent thronged.

So I think we may safely deduce from this fact that the play-houses are not at those times (or indeed at any time) frequented as schools wherein to witness and to be improved by the characterization of virtue, and that the theatre may not be thence commended as a morally safe place of resort for those who make profession of the Christian name. But that which gives occasion for very serious present reflection is, that in this time of profound peace throughout the country, and of numberless blessings showered upon us from the Almighty's hand, the play-houses should be looked upon with far more tolerance than in the period of the Puritan Commonwealth or the early American Republic, while at the same time they are probably (upon the average) as low in character and proportionally as great in number as they were in Paris when that city was under the sway of the God-denying, blood-seeking, and depraved leaders of the French Revolution.

Seriousness of the present situation.

Perhaps there may be no more fitting place than just here to refer to that misapplication of the virtue of hospitality, which under its name and cover permits church-professing men to take their guests to the theatre. A Buddha-worshiping dignitary from Japan or China comes to our shores, and for an evening's entertainment is taken to a play, which must give him a very low conception of what our Christianity permits. A blanket Indian from the plains, whose children are being taught the "better religion" at an agency school, or perhaps at Carlisle, is marched to a variety theatre, where he is similarly impressed by our civilization and social corruption. As to the display of civic hospitality among our own people, a military organization or Masonic lodge visits a distant city, and all in a body, as an essential part of the programme of good fellowship, are led to witness scenes upon the stage which they would be ashamed to introduce to their families at home. Is there aught of the grace of hospitality in thus manifesting the work of the devil? I remember being painfully impressed with this thought when, several years ago, a military company of young men from a Southern city came on to New York, and were taken by their hosts to theatres where notoriously immoral plays were enacted.

I have felt ever since that I would like to appeal to the parents, wives, and sisters of those visiting Atlanta young men, and perhaps through this medium it may reach them even now. And yet while I write sincerity obliges me to admit, that there is a large field for the exercise of

solicitude and fraternal appeal right in my own city; for, in an item of last month which is before me, I read how a junior cricket club of Philadelphia—about two dozen lads of from ten to eighteen years of age—visited a similar junior club of New York; how on the evening of the day of arrival they "went to the theatre in a body;" how they played their cricket match the following day, and "again visited a metropolitan theatre together."

I come now to the last (and generally little considered) division of my subject, it being of the nature of an inquiry as to how far the professing Church may be responsible for the fostering and present prevalence of the theatre and theatrical entertainments.

Responsibility of the professing Church.

It appears to have been in the thirteenth century that the external part of religious worship was loaded down with many additions, intended by their outward splendor and magnificence to completely overawe the multitude. "Now it was," says a late writer, "that the stage was pressed into the service of the Church, and the mysteries and moralities were written and placed therein, illustrating by scenic action sacred subjects." These miracle plays, mysteries, and interludes were, as has been mentioned before, the first theatrical performances in the Middle Ages, and marked the origin of the modern European stage. They were usually given in convents, colleges, and church edifices, or in the halls of the nobility. Of these "mysteries" of the Middle Ages, Hannah More remarks: "Events too

Stage "mysteries" of the Middle Ages.

solemn for exhibition and too awful for detail were brought before the audience with a gravity more offensive than levity itself."

From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries many were the protests against these and other moral abuses accompanying the Papal rule, but now again in this nineteenth century of the Christian era, when it would seem as though the spiritual ought to keep pace with material enlightenment, the professing Church is nevertheless making alarming approaches in the direction of ritualism, sacerdotalism, and ceremonialism. As Howard Crosby with much plainness, yet very truthfully, says:

"The Church of God is to-day courting the world. Its members are trying to bring it down to the level of the ungodly. The ball, the theatre, nude and lewd art, social luxuries with all their loose moralities, are making inroads into the sacred inclosure of the Church, and, as a satisfaction for all this worldliness, Christians are making a great deal of Lent and Easter and Good Friday and church ornamentation. It is the old trick of Satan. The Jewish Church struck on that rock; the Roman Church was wrecked on the same, and the Protestant Church is fast reaching the like doom."

Upon this theme of "church ornamentation" that gifted writer of religious poetry, the late Frances R. Havergal, wrote thoughtfully and discriminatingly, not long before her death, in treating of the matter of "Christmas Decorations." Her opinion hereupon is certainly entitled to serious attention, especially as pro-

ceeding from one who, with such a love for harmonic measures in language, might have been thought likely to look with an indulgent eye upon the grace of floral decoration—even in church edifices. With the hope that her clear expression upon this subject may be heeded in a direction where outward show, not to say "stage effects," have been making rapid strides during recent years, I quote the following passage:

F. R. Havergal on church ornamentation.

"The experience of every honest conscience shows that when we, who naturally love all that is beautiful, enter a church [building] beautifully decorated, the temptation to wandering eyes and thoughts is just in proportion to the exquisiteness and elaborateness of the decorations. We have come to seek Jesus, to find the Shepherd 'by the footsteps of the flock;' we want to commune with Him, and we want Him to speak to our hearts; we want to be freshly and specially 'looking unto Jesus' in all the meaning of that word, looking away from all else, looking unto Him; and at once our eye is caught by an elegant festoon, and a singularly effective twining of a pillar or picking out of a moulding, and a novel arrangement of the panels of the pulpit. It is all lovely, much prettier than last year, the general effect is so good, and so on. And suddenly we remember what we came for, and we make a great effort to turn away our eyes and fix them on 'Jesus only;' but somehow the electric chain has been severed, the 'other things' have entered in; and when we again look up, to meet the smile of the

' Prince of Peace,' we find there has been ' something between,' our eyes have involuntarily turned away from the ' King in His beauty' to the passing prettiness of garland and wreath. What have we not lost?"

Although the tendency of the times is toward the legally setting apart as public holidays those days which certain religious denominations have habitually observed in commemoration of the birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, yet the result of this authorization has been (at least in all the cities) to so markedly crowd the theatres and all pleasure resorts, and so to give opportunity for indulgence in riotous conduct and licentious revelry, that many have reached the conclusion that the enactment of these public holidays was unwise. One quotation from a Baptist paper of a year or two since will serve for much which might be adduced to show that these so-called "holy-days" are made the occasions for hilarious excesses, which are notably on the increase, and which really make them, as estimated by their results, the most *un*holy of all the days of the year.

Holy-days occasions for excess.

" Our own city [Atlanta] was disgraced in a deplorable manner. We hope never to be forced to see the like again. Crowds of men and boys, white and black, surged through the streets and obstructed the sidewalks, drinking, swaggering, cursing, and blackguarding each other, flourishing pistols, firing them in utter disregard of the danger to life and limb, and otherwise indulging in acts of depravity and beastliness. One or two persons were

murdered or mortally wounded, desperate rencontres took place, many were bruised, and the few arrests that could be made under this condition of affairs sufficed to fill the police station until cells and corridors could hold no more. The pistol, knife, club, and whisky-bottle appeared to be the controlling factors of our communal system. A day theoretically supposed to be devoted to the Christian rites of peace and love and good-will, and consecrated to the advent on earth of the Son of God, the blessed Redeemer of the world, was turned into a Saturnalia, made foul with the slime of orgies, and blackened with the records of atrocious crimes."

But, it may be objected, all this iniquity is merely incidental to those days, and ought not to be charged upon the professing Church. Without conceding this, let us turn from the gross and forbidding picture, and consider whether the mantle of the Christian religion is not thrown over practices which, if seemingly more refined than those just brought to view, are yet of so insidious a nature that their influence is altogether in opposition to true, spiritual religion.

It cannot now be consistently claimed in many quarters that the end sought in associating together as religious congregations is simply the worship of God and the "communion of saints." The Church must provide entertainment as well. Now, from the church fair, oyster supper, and strawberry festival, to amateur operatics and the stage, the step has been proven to be not a long one. Thus, the first annual

Church theatricals.

report of a church "guild" sets forth "that during the past year six entertainments were given at the club-house, a series of tableaux in —— parish school building, and a theatrical entertainment at the Amateur Drawing Room. These entertainments increased the membership of the club and will be continued during the present year."

Again, we find pool and billiard tables, etc., provided for clubs of workingmen under the care of churches, and series of public games between the clubs announced—with theatricals following. At Saratoga, early in the year, a fancy dress ball for the benefit of a "Rectory Fund" was given, followed by a grand banquet at midnight, and (according to a secular paper) the resuming of the dancing thereafter and its continuation until a late hour. The *Guide to Holiness*, upon this matter of "standing in the mixture," aptly says:

"The discovery has been made that the Church, in order to hold its young people to its altars, must provide for the natural craving for amusement. It used to be held that Jesus and His work furnished ample resources to meet the loftiest aspirations of a saved soul. * * The holidays furnish occasion for the ingenious and progressive sons and daughters of Zion to make full proof of their new vocation. They are now busy preparing dramas, comedies, farces, suppers, fairs, and entertainments of every conceivable sort. They are spending 'their wretched strength for naught.' So far from preventing attendance upon a full-grown theatre and opera by these efforts, they are whetting the appetite of the people therefor. * * It

is eating out the life of the Church—it is destroying our young people, rendering them unfit for all true spiritual exercise. Give your money liberally for every laudable Church object—but stand aloof, positively, in the holidays and evermore, from the unholy festivals."

Without desiring to unduly pursue this concluding portion of my topic, I believe it is nevertheless of the first importance that it be clearly shown wherein the professing Church, in this matter, obstructs and stumbles. No reversal of the popular estimate of, and attendance upon, the play-house, need be looked for while the Church, with mistaken charity and complaisance, casts its mantle over levity and folly, instead of pointing the way of light and holiness.

The views which have been just declared upon the subject of entertainment and amusement-hunting by and on behalf of the (outward) Church are convincingly and at length set forth in a pamphlet of 61 pages lately issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication.* The opinion is therein expressed (corroborating what has been said before) that the Church is now rather regarded as a convenient medium of social intercourse and social pleasures than as an educator of the religious affections, the author quoting in support of this view from an essay (which has elicited considerable remark) upon "Certain Dangerous Tendencies of American Life" (Boston, 1880). "The Church," according to the essayist, "is now for the

* The Sociable, the Entertainment, and the Bazar. By Alfred E. Myers, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Owasco, N. Y.

most part a depository of social rather than religious influences. Its chief force or vitality is no longer religious. * * * For a very large class the Church furnishes opportunity for a pleasant social life, which is in no way different from the social life of amiable, intelligent people out of the Church: that there is nothing distinctively religious about it."*

It should be premised that the Presbyterian writer is solicitous not to be understood as in any wise discouraging the commingling of those comprising a congregation in any right way. Indeed, there are few things more helpful to the young who yearn for a better life than the life they may have previously led, than the chaste yet cheerful conversation of the spiritually dignified and dedicated servants of the Lord, who give evidence that they look for a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Having pointed out that a first result of the Church "sociable" is, that instead of social distinctions with their attractions and repulsions being submerged, it causes them to "rise into a conspicuousness" which they would not otherwise possess; that "the sociable not only does not help the spiritual growth of the Church, but by a factitious bustle and stir diverts attention from spiritual deficiencies," he next proceeds to show how the sociable

The Church sociable a forerunner of unseemly entertainments.

* The *Illustrated Christian Weekly* tersely defines the distinction when it says:—"Christian workers find the social spirit active and strong among them, but it comes as an incident, not as the end of their practical fellowship."

commonly merges into the entertainment, merry-making, and feast, all showing a forsaking of the simple, apostolical Church economy. Now, the entertainment appears to have become possible through a reversal of the Scripture prerogative of those who should be as "nursing fathers and mothers,"—these, instead of *leading* the flock, satisfying themselves with the thought that as religion should be made palatable to the young it is expedient to push them to the front in all activities, especially in amusements. Of numerous instances cited by the author, it will suffice to quote the following:

"A church which has recently received a number of young people into active membership is the scene of a humorous entertainment. A stage is laid over the pulpit platform and over the place lately occupied by the communion-table, and there the young converts, with others, are encouraged to perform for the benefit of the church. At another entertainment a group of young gentlemen go through the form of selling at auction a young lady to the highest bidder. At another of these diversions, before people of education and refined taste, a professional musician renders a roystering bacchanalian song with startling energy. Clergymen and their wives figure in costume as George Washington and Martha Washington.

The Church walking with the world.

One minister reads humorous selections; another sings comic songs; others make droll speeches. The pulpit is sometimes removed, and Santa Claus and his chimney occupy the platform. Again, in just such a position, along with other attractions, we

have an organ-grinder, with a wealthy middle-aged citizen sustaining the dignified *rôle* of the monkey passing the hat for pennies. The superintendent of a Sunday-school, chalked and painted, poses as an ancient king, and teachers amuse the audience with a semblance of stage embraces. Under the auspices of a Sunday-school a college glee-club provokes great merriment by its bold allusions to the truths which, in the school, are taught as tremendous verities. In the 'Old Folks' Concert' solemn hymns and revered tunes are sung in a drawling style to raise a laugh." At an "exhibition in the lecture-room of a prominent church * * a worthy gentleman of remarkable sobriety of deportment and visage, and excellent in the prayer-meeting, played 'the sneezer,' and another Christian gentleman feigned intoxication, with his fair and temperate face smeared with red blotches to assist the illusion." All these things, be it said, for the cause (so claimed) of Christ, yet all so demoralizing in their tendency, and withal so revolting to reasoning minds, that only the obligation of a required duty can be excuse for their presentation here. I refrain from taking up the cognate subject of the Bazar, with its trivial and mischievous accompaniments, supplying the place thereof with these apt lines of the author of "The Church Walking with the World,"—

> "And fairs and shows in the halls were held,
> And the world and her children were there,
> And laughter and music and feasts prevailed
> In the place that was meant for prayer."

Without controversy, these things can only operate to deaden the spiritual life of the participants, and, in the case of those who exhibit an aptitude for smartly performing their parts, to draw them really to the stage as actors and actresses. Instances of such a result are not rare. It must hence be apparent that, so far from festivities and entertainments preserving the younger members of the Church from the contaminations of the world, there will rather happen, as the writer from whom I have quoted concludes—"a graduation from the church drama to the better-appointed and better-acted drama of the theatre, and from the somewhat tame evening entertainment in the church-parlor to the ball which is not held in the interest of the church."

Deadening effects of these entertainments.

The problem, therefore, seems naturally to narrow itself down to this: that if avowed Christians of "respectability" would have the vile variety theatres of the poorer classes removed from our cities, such persons cannot consistently give countenance to the play-houses of the so-styled "better sort;" and if they would have the low music-halls, with their tawdry and lewd accessories abolished, they, on their part, should have naught to do with the elegant opera, its alluring ballet and unsavory plot. As discerned by the Apostle Peter, "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God," and this discernment and resultant separation (it may be added) should additionally extend to the picture and art galleries, the highly spiced drawing-room fiction, the

private wine-cellars and billiard rooms, the stock jobbing, etc., of the well-to-do and presumably respectable professed Christians, if any headway is to be made against the common drinking and gambling habits, and the cheap, demoralizing literature of the day. It is not evident to the writer how any other conclusion is to be arrived at, and, with this persuasion before him, he would ask attention to the thoughtful words of three widely separated, but coinciding witnesses, touching the matter of *holy fidelity:*

The problem briefly stated.

"To do all our duty," says the late Charles G. Finney, "we must rebuke sin in high places. Can this be done with all needed severity without, in many cases, giving offense and incurring the charge of censoriousness? No; it is impossible—and to maintain the contrary would be to impeach the wisdom and holiness of Jesus Christ."

"The law of the spiritual life," says a late writer in the *Independent*, "is separation. God's people first separated from the dead religious world at Jerusalem. The testimony of the early Church was one of life for a world to come. It gathered both its testimony and its life about a risen Christ. It did not study to make peace with the world or how to adjust itself to its surroundings, but it steadily testified against it, and called upon the people of God to break with it."

Three witnesses to holy fidelity.

Finally, to quote one who appears to be a clergyman of the English Established Church, the author of the *brochure*, "Modern Christianity a Civilized Heathenism,"

—"Until the world," he says, "is wholly converted, which nobody yet pretends, His [Christ's] people must ever wage with it a deadly war. There can be no peace between two such armies as the soldiers of Christ and the servants of the devil. His disciples must fight as their Captain fought, making themselves [if need be] an offense, a nuisance, an abhorrence to every man who is not, like them, an open confessor of His name."

Therefore, in dealing with theatrical entertainments and similar stumbling devices within the pale of the professing Church, as also with the theatre itself, and all that is allied to it, in society and the world, it may be morally profitable for those concerned to bear in mind the uncompromising example set by the Master in cleansing the Temple of that which defiled it. In Christ we see infinite compassion, even unto death, for sinners, but not a moment's parley with sin. Instructive, and of good warrant, likewise, for our guidance, is the narrative of the crafty procedure of Zion's active enemy, Tobiah the Ammonite, who, in the absence of Nehemiah, the Governor, so far overcame with his guile even the High Priest himself as to have plausibly persuaded the latter to prepare him "a chamber in the courts of the house of God." No doubt Tobiah was a man of polished speech, who could minister abundant entertainment to his hearers, yet when Nehemiah heard of the evil that had been done—how like an odious barnacle, the world, in the person of the Ammonite, had fastened itself upon the very

Two examples to follow in dealing with the theatre.

house of God—it "grieved" him "sore," insomuch that he summarily "cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber." Would that all magistrates and others in authority who have to deal with theatres and theatrical entertainments might emulate the godly zeal (according to knowledge) of Nehemiah, the righteous Governor.

In concluding this essay, perhaps I can do no better than to revive the language of the Address issued by Frankford Monthly Meeting of Friends to its members (1880), wherein it is said:

A safe conclusion recommended.

"In much tenderness we beseech you, dear young people of every class, to bring this whole question of amusement and recreation to your loving Saviour. With His teachings, as set forth in the New Testament, before you, and by the light of His grace in your hearts, pray for wisdom and strength, and you will be given clearly to see what it is and who they are that are truly serving God, and what and who are serving Him not; what will make for your own soul's peace, and what will hinder it; and wherein your true safety lies."

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